**Setting up of export technology fund**

3855. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is considering a slew of measures, including setting up of an Export Technology Fund for small and medium enterprises;

(b) if so, what is the corpus of such a fund;

(c) whether Government also propose to focus and special scheme for countries that India plans to sign under the Free Trade Agreement;

(d) whether such a scheme would allow exporters to hedge violations in US Dollar, as at present 70 per cent of India's exports are pegged against US Dollar; and

(e) if so, whether India's ambitious export target of $ 200 billion for 2008-09 will be achieved?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) An Export Technology Fund for small and medium enterprises has not been set up by the Government.

(b) Does not arise;

(c) There is no special scheme for countries with whom India is negotiating a Foreign Trade Agreement.

(d) Does not arise.

(e) The export target for the year has been set at US$ 200 billion.

**Continuous rise in cement prices**

†3856. SHRI LALIT KISHORE CHATURVEDI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there has been a continuous increase in the prices of cement during the last two years;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the reason behind this price increase has been making of cartel by the cement companies

(c) whether it is also a fact that the Tamil Nadu Government warned these companies to close them down in case of not reducing the prices; and

(d) whether Government will consider to constitute some regulating agency to control this situation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND PROMOTION, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ASHWANI KUMAR): (a) and (d) The prices of cement increased sharply between December, 2005 and March, 2007. However, they have since largely stabilized in 2007-08. The setting up of Cement Regulatory Authority is not considered necessary at this stage.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) MRTP Commission, a quasi-judicial body, is already seized of the matter regarding cartelization by the cement companies.

(c) The information is being collected from the State Government.

**Trade Imbalance with China**

3857. MS. MABEL REBELLO:
SHRI B.J. PANDA:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that our trade imbalance with China has grown very fast and there is an urgent need to rectify this; and

(b) if so, what is the existing trade deficit, *inter-alia* indicating the action plan of the Government to bridge this gap?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) The trade balance is currently in favour of China. During the year 2006-07, imports from China were US$ 17.44 billion and exports US$ 8.28 billion resulting in trade deficit of US$ 9.16 billion. The issue of rising trade deficit was taken up by the Commerce & Industry Minister on January 12,2008 during his talks with the Chinese Minister of Commerce. However, the Government does not plan to bridge trade gaps with individual countries.

**Connivance of cement companies in fixing prices**

†3858. SHRI SATYAVRAT CHATURVEDI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC) in its decision has stated that the cement companies of private sector had connived in fixing the prices of cement from February, 1990 to April, 1990;

(b) the retail prices of cement in December, 2005 and December, 2007;

(c) the reasons behind rapid price-hike of cement; and

(d) the action being taken by Government against the companies responsible for it?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND PROMOTION MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ASHWANI KUMAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) The average price of cement in December 2005 was Rs. 158/- per bag and Rs. 230/- per bag in December 2007. The increase in cement prices is mainly due to mis-match between demand and supply. Government has taken a number of measures to increase the supply of cement in the market to cater to increased demand. These include facilitating import by reducing the import duty on cement to 'Nil', removal of countervailing duty and special additional customs duty. Further, MMTC Ltd., a Government of India enterprise, TANCEM, a State Government enterprise of Tamil Nadu and M/s. Puducherry Agro Services

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.